

**STATEMENT
OF
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VETERANS' EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING SERVICE
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

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INTRODUCTION

Good afternoon, Chairman Wenstrup, Ranking Member Takano, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to participate in today's hearing. As Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy at the Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS) at the Department of Labor (DOL or Department), I appreciate the opportunity to discuss the Department's views on pending legislation impacting veterans. I commend you all for your tireless efforts to ensure that America fulfills its obligations to our current service members, veterans, and their families.

While this hearing is focused on numerous bills pending before the Subcommittee, I will limit my remarks to legislation that has a direct impact on the programs administered by DOL, specifically H.R. 474, the "Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Programs Reauthorization Act of 2015."

Secretary Perez and I know that one of the most important ways to prevent and end veteran homelessness is through a good job. However, employment is not the only factor in overcoming veteran homelessness. Long-term stability requires a coordinated level of care between many federal partners like the Departments of Veteran Affairs (VA) and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), state and local organizations, non-profits, and the private sector to ensure veterans are successful in overcoming the myriad of barriers created by homelessness. To that end, the Department is committed to helping the Administration meet its goal of ending homelessness among veterans in 2015, as guided by *Opening Doors: The Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness*. In leading this effort, the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) has generated powerful national partnerships at every level to work toward ending homelessness across the nation. Currently, Secretary Perez serves as the Council Chair.

Through these interagency efforts and many others, the Administration has achieved historic progress. According to the HUD's 2014 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress, homelessness among veterans has declined by 33 percent from January 2010 to January 2014. Yet, on a single night in January 2014, there were still 49,933 homeless veterans. That is why

the Department looks forward to working with the Subcommittee on legislation that provides the brave men and women who serve our nation with the employment support, assistance and opportunities they deserve to succeed in the civilian workforce.

We note also that our partnerships throughout DOL extend VETS' ability to achieve its mission, and bring all of DOL resources to bear for America's veterans, separating service members, and their families. VETS' mission is focused on four key areas: (1) preparing veterans for meaningful careers; (2) providing them with employment resources and expertise; (3) protecting their employment rights; and, (4) promoting the employment of veterans and related training opportunities to employers across the country.

One important component is the Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program (HVRP), which VETS administers to help homeless veterans reenter the labor force. The agency provides grants to state and local Workforce Investment Boards, tribal governments and organizations, public agencies, for-profit/commercial entities, and non-profit organizations to administer the services necessary to assist in reintegrating homeless veterans into meaningful employment and to stimulate the development of effective service delivery systems that will address the complex problems facing homeless veterans. The HVRP program succeeds, not only because of the hard work and local connections of our grantees, but also because of the collaborative efforts of our government partners at the Federal and State levels. These efforts help ensure that homeless veterans receive a robust, comprehensive network of support.

H.R. 474 – “HOMELESS VETERANS’ REINTEGRATION PROGRAMS REAUTHORIZATION ACT OF 2015”

H.R. 474, the “Homeless Veterans’ Reintegration Programs Reauthorization Act of 2015,” would reauthorize HVRP through 2020. Additionally, the bill expands the eligibility for services under HVRP, to include not only homeless veterans, but also veterans participating in VA-supported housing programs for which certain rental assistance is provided and veterans who are transitioning from being incarcerated.

The Department supports the five-year extension to the HVRP authorization. HVRP is one of the few nationwide federal programs focusing exclusively on helping homeless veterans to reintegrate into the workforce. HVRP is employment-focused; each participant receives customized services to address his or her specific barriers to employment. Services may include, but are not limited to, occupational, classroom, and on-the-job training, as well as job search, placement assistance, and post-placement follow-up services.

H.R. 474 would extend HVRP's authorization to 2020; the current authorization is set to expire at the end of FY 2015. Grantees under this program are competitively selected for a one-year award, with up to two additional option years, contingent on the availability of appropriations and grantees' compliance with the terms of their grant.

As mentioned, H.R. 474 would expand eligible participants under HVRP. Veterans currently receiving housing assistance under the HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH)

program and Native American veterans participating in the Native American Housing Assistance program are not eligible for HVRP services. Under current legislative authority, approximately 78,000 veterans who participate in the HUD-VASH program annually are ineligible for HVRP program's services because they are not, technically, homeless. VETS believes housing programs, such as HUD-VASH, are critical to the rehabilitation and success of homeless veterans because the availability of housing and health services improves their job readiness and employability.

In addition, under H.R. 474, veterans who are transitioning from incarceration would also be eligible for HVRP's services. For veterans, having an arrest record is a major barrier to employment and can lead to homelessness. VETS believes it is critical to begin delivering employment support prior to their release in order to better prepare them to secure civilian employment.

While VETS supports the goals of this legislation, these changes would mean a substantial increase in the eligible population. To accommodate these changes within existing funding, VETS would need to establish service priorities, to reach those with the greatest needs and avoid duplication. VETS is willing to work with Congress to discuss further amendments to H.R. 474 that would help ensure the goals of the bill are met.

HVRP PROGRAM PERFORMANCE & ADDITIONAL SERVICES TO ASSIST HOMELESS VETERANS

HVRP's client-centric, hands-on approach has helped place thousands of previously-homeless veterans, some of whom were chronically homeless, on a path to self-sufficiency. Historically, the Department also has funded two additional types of grants designed to address difficult-to-serve subpopulations of homeless veterans: the Homeless Female Veterans and Veterans with Families Program (HFVWWF) and the Incarcerated Veterans' Transition Program (IVTP). In addition, the Department supports "Stand Down" events (described below) and technical assistance grants.

In FY 2013 (or during Program Year (PY) 2012), DOL was allocated \$36,187,711 for HVRP. With these resources, DOL funded 35 new HVRP grants, 90 option-year HVRP grant extensions, 22 HFVWWF grants, 14 IVTP grants, and 90 Stand Down grants. These grantees enrolled 16,133 participants, placing 63.4 percent into employment, with a cost per participant of \$1,840.

In FY 2014 (or during PY 2013), the HVRP program received an appropriation of \$38,109,000 with which the Department awarded 37 new HVRP grants, 101 option year HVRP grants, 18 HFVWWF grants, and 66 Stand Down grants. These grantees are expected to provide services to 17,000 homeless veterans, with an estimated placement rate of over 60 percent, at an estimated cost per participant of \$2,200. In addition, to support grantees and disseminate best practices, the Department awarded two technical assistance Cooperative Agreements.

HVRP grant recipients are measured against four performance outcomes outlined in our policy guidance. The performance outcomes are: (1) Number of Enrollments; (2) Number of

participants placed in unsubsidized employment; (3) Placement Rate; and (4) Cost per Placement. DOL staff members work closely with grantees to help them succeed and to achieve their goals for all four performance outcomes. HVRP grant recipients also report on the average earnings for individuals who retain employment.

Table 1. HVRP Participant Statistics, PYs 2012-2013*

Performance Outcomes	PY 2012	PY 2013**
Participants Enrolled	17,480	16,133
Placed Into Employment	11,317	10,226
Average Cost Per Participant	\$1,985.95	\$1,903.28
Average Hourly Wage at Placement	\$11.22	\$11.50

* As reported in the Veterans' Employment and Training Service Operations and Program Activity Report (VOPAR) System, HVRP Program Status Report, including HFVWWF but not ITVP data.

**The PY 2013 data listed is as of December 31, 2014. PY 2013 will be finalized on March 31, 2015.

The Homeless Female Veterans and Veterans with Families Program

HFVWWF are competitive grants that specifically target the subpopulation of homeless female veterans and veterans with families who are “at risk” of becoming homeless. As noted in HUD’s 2014 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress, homeless women veterans accounted for 10 percent of the overall homeless veteran population. The program provides direct services through a case management approach that leverages federal, state, and local resources. Eligible veterans and their families are connected with appropriate employment and life skills support to ensure a successful integration into the workforce.

One example of a veteran served through the HFVWWF program is Ms. Latisha Jeffries of Tennessee, a 42-year-old Navy veteran was referred to the Volunteers of America (VOA), an HFVWWF-funded program, while visiting an American Job Center (AJC). She was precariously housed, was unemployed, and was facing eviction, and she was receiving no financial support for herself and her two children. With the assistance of representatives at VOA, she soon found an entry-level job with Comcast Communications as a Direct Sales Representative. This income is helping to resolve her financial issues, and, thanks to the guidance and encouragement she is receiving from HFVWWF, she is optimistic about the future. Her five-year goal, besides getting her children through school, is to get back into management and to own her own home again. She credits the representatives from the HFVWWF program for motivating her to continue her journey toward financial and professional success.

The Incarcerated Veterans' Transition Program Grants

The IVTP was last awarded in FY 2010; those grants continued up through September 30, 2013, after which funds were not appropriated for the program. IVTP grants were designed to support incarcerated veterans who are at risk of homelessness by providing referral and career counseling services, job training, placement assistance and other services. Eligible IVTP participants included veterans who were incarcerated and were within 18 months of release, or were released less than six months from a correctional institution or facility. For PY 2012, IVTP grantees enrolled 1,408 participants and had a placement rate of 63.4 percent with an average hourly wage of \$10.69 at placement.

Stand Down and Technical Assistance Grants

Through HVRP, the Department also supports “Stand Down” events. These events, typically held over one to three days in local communities, provide an array of social services to homeless veterans. Stand Down organizers partner with federal and state agencies, local businesses and social services providers to offer critical services, including temporary shelter, meals, clothing, hygiene care, medical examinations, immunizations, state identification cards, veteran benefit counseling, training program information, employment services, and referral to other supportive services.

The HVRP grant also provides funding to the National Veterans Technical Assistance Center (NVTAC). The NVTAC is a Technical Assistance center, which provides a broad range of technical assistance on veterans’ homelessness programs and grant applications to: existing and potential HVRP, HFVWWF, and Stand Down grantees; interested employers; Veterans Service Organizations; and, federal, state, and local agency partners.

Jobs for Veterans State Grants (JVSG)

DOL awards Jobs for Veterans State grants (JVSG) as a formula grant to each state and territory to support two types of staff positions in the AJC network: Disabled Veterans’ Outreach Program (DVOP) specialists and Local Veterans’ Employment Representatives (LVER). DVOP and LVER staff support HVRP grantees by helping grantees achieve entered employment goals through case management, direct employer contact, job development, and follow-up services.

DVOP specialists provide intensive services targeted at meeting the employment needs of disabled veterans and other veterans with significant barriers to employment, including homeless veterans. In addition, DVOP specialists often refer veterans who experience homelessness to other AJC services, such as the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA) Adult and Dislocated Workers services and training. AJCs provided JVSG-funded services to 17,734 homeless veterans in PY 2013. For their part, LVER staff conduct outreach to employers and engage in advocacy efforts with local businesses to increase employment opportunities for veterans, and encourage the hiring of veterans.

The transition from WIA to the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) also provides an extraordinary opportunity to improve job and career options for our nation’s jobseekers and workers, including veterans, through an integrated, job driven public workforce system that links diverse talent to businesses. While retaining the network of DVOP specialists at AJCs, WIOA strengthens accountability and transparency of outcomes for core programs, including establishing common performance indicators across these programs. The Department is considering the adoption of these new common performance indicators for JVSG and other VETS-administered programs, so that we will know with even greater detail the outcomes of our investments in veterans employment and related programs.

OTHER LEGISLATION BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE

The Subcommittee also is considering legislation to encourage companies that contract with the Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) to hire veterans. It should be noted for background that DOL's Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP) enforces a provision of the Vietnam Era Veterans' Readjustment Assistance Act of 1974 (VEVRAA), 38 U.S.C. 4212, which prohibits covered Federal contractors and subcontractors from discriminating in employment against protected veterans. This provision also requires these contractors to take affirmative action to employ and advance in employment protected veterans. Since the legislation address contracting preferences of the VA, however, DOL respectfully defers to that agency with respect to that bill, and defers to other agencies affected by the remaining pieces of legislation.

CONCLUSION

We at the Department of Labor remain committed to the Administration's goal of ending veteran homelessness, and we look forward to working with the Subcommittee to ensure the continued success of our efforts. Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Takano, and Members of the Subcommittee this concludes my statement. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today. I am happy to answer any questions that you may have.